

The Kiowa Legend of Sintí

recorded by Albert S. Gatschet

Adapted from:

Albert S. Gatschet: Sintí, der erste Mensch. Eine Schöpfungsmythe der Kayowē-Indianer, aus ihrer Sprache übertragen. In: Das Ausland 63(1890), no. 46, pp. 901-904.

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Translated from German to English

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Sínte he-inte-ikía
[The Legend of Sintí],
or,
The Porcupine That Raises the Girl
into the Heavens

Adapted from: p. 901-902 in the primary source

Narrator: Medicine-Feather

Time of recording: before 1890

A group of girls were in the camp and were playing games. Amongst them was one who was especially beloved by her parents and relatives. She rarely conversed with her playmates, but rather preferred to be reclusive and alone. Today everyone called her to join in the game. She went there but soon left it again, and the other girls continued the game.

Then the young girl noticed a partially hidden object in the foliage of a nearby tree that looked like a porcupine and climbed up after it. It was the sun¹ who stood behind the tree. He offered her his hand and helped her climb up. Slowly she climbed up the branches of the tree and then lay down next to the sun. Then the tree began to grow, and the girl, borne by the growing tree, was lifted up, higher and higher. She rose up so high without knowing it that, when she looked down, she was frightened. She kept rising, higher and higher, until she reached the top of the sky-dome. Then the sun said to her, »I

¹ See further on: »the son of the sun«. [Note in the original publication.]



come from here [from the heavens],« and transformed into a man.

The absence of the girl had been noticed in the camp down below, and her playmates asked her father what had happened to her. At the same time, they told him that something like a porcupine had lain in the foliage of a tree; she had climbed after it to look at the thing but had not returned. (Later it would be revealed that the porcupine had been the son of the sun.)

In the meantime the sun who had transformed into a man had reached the heavens with the girl and they settled down as husband and wife. The husband got ready to hunt buffalo to bring meat back home. The wife twisted buffalo sinew into strands and with them attached stone rakes to wooden handles for digging up edible roots. The husband warned her not to dig up rootstocks that had been touched by buffalo. When she dug some up anyway, the ground suddenly split open; she looked down, and behold, far down below there was an expanse of land. She climbed down to the new land and spent some time there. Then she hurried back to the tipi she had just left, took twisted sinew from there, wound it around a stick used for digging up edible roots and thrust it into the ground at the spot it had opened up. She then let the end of the sinew slide down through the opening, hoping that it would reach the land below. She was mistaken, for the sinew was too short. So she set off back to her tipi to prepare another piece of sinew and tie it to the older piece so that she could reach the land below. Back at the opening, she again fastened one end



of the sinew to the digging stick like a belt, the other she tied around her body, and above her she tied her infant son to the stick. Then she leapt down, but got stuck halfway along the too-short rope and hung in the air, unable to touch the grass of the prairie which she tried to grab with her hands.

In the meantime, her spouse, the young sun man, had pursued game as a hunter and had brought his prey home. He did not find his wife there, but when he looked around the nearby area, he espied her dangling on the rope. He took a stone, rounded it off and told it to go over the child, but to hit the woman on the head. Then he let go of the stone by rolling it down the sinew from above (where the sun circles). The stone avoided the child but hit the woman on the head further down. She fell dead on the spot, and the sinew tore. The child had also plummeted down. He sought his dead mother on the ground and suckled on her breasts until she began to decompose, and even then he kept on suckling.

After he had finally gone away from the body, he noticed that someone had set up their tipi nearby. No one was in the tipi, so the boy went to the nearby corn field. In the meantime, the mistress of the tipi returned home and stepped inside, having noticed footprints leading towards the tipi. Pleased at the prospect of a visiting boy or girl, she prepared a sausage and a game ball with arrows, which should serve as gifts. After this she went back into the corn field, and upon her return the arrows were missing. She concluded joyfully that the visitor must be a boy, because only a boy could have shot the arrows at the ball. »Old spider,« that was the name of the woman, now



hid herself, wrapped up in a rough fur, under the entrance of the tipi.

The boy entered, ate some of the corn that he found and saw the old woman lying there. She stood up in a flash and tried to grab him. He cried out and tried to bite her to get rid of her, but she remained unharmed. She picked him up, put him on her back, and he gradually gained her affection. She cared for him and sang him a song, »Your mother is dead and decayed, but still you feed from her!« upon which the child called back, »Grandmother, do bend me this stick into a hoop!« And she bent the stick, made a hoop out of it and fastened both ends with a piece of skin that she cut out of her loins. »Don't throw it up into the air!« she cautioned him.

At first the boy rolled the hoop ahead of himself, but then threw it, against the advice of the old woman, up over himself. It fell down onto his head and split the boy in half along the middle. The old woman was sitting in her tipi and all of a sudden heard two boys speaking instead of one. The hoop had created two with its fall. »Just now a brother arrived,« said one of them to the grandmother, »for two have come from one.«² She said to them, »Do not roll the hoop while the wind is blowing!« But they disregarded the advice and rolled the hoop until it rolled on its own [propelled by the wind], and the two ran after it wildly. It rolled so far that it escaped their reach, and they could no longer catch it. It bounced up a hill and came across the tipi of a man who had camped there. The hoop became entangled in the tipi poles and got stuck. The two boys, who by then had hurried over, asked the man in the

tipi, who was a sorcerer, for their hoop, and he bade them enter and sit down. They now saw something wrapped around the tipi poles and also requested this. The man told his spouse to unwrap the object from the cloth. She did as she was told, and thereupon the smoke from the campfire went into the tipi instead of escaping above. When she opened the second bundle, the smoke became much thicker, so that the boys almost suffocated. The one said to the other, »Brother, help me, I am suffocating!« »Alright!« replied the younger one, »Just climb up to the top of the tipi.« The brother took his advice, and the smoke stayed above in the tipi without bothering them any further. The sorcerer, who had also been badly affected by the smoke, told his wife to return the hoop to the boys. With this in hand they left the tipi, hurried back to the grandmother, and told her about their dangerous adventure. She scolded them thoroughly because they did not heed her warning.

They did not know that which the old woman had long known, that long ago a flood of water had wiped out the human race and that she alone, the »Old Spider« had survived. She escaped death alone because she saved herself by walking on the surface of the water. One half of the Kayowē Indians all perished then. She was the only surviving [human] being that survived from the other half. All the Kayowē living today are descendent from *Sintí*, the boy that she took into her tipi. Following their current customs, these Indians reproduced and multiplied after the flood.

This is the end of the story.



² In his comment, Gatschet presents a small portion of the vernacular text with literal translation (p. 903):

»Kótad, táⁿ! é-ipai! heikó apáhiḍ,« ónkoti po-
póⁿiba intáḍiḍ, hé-iko apáhiḍ: »púe mái imkiáto!«
»Hó-o!« túngné táḍiě, heikó sá-ayi; heikó mái im-
kiáhiḍ, heikó ónko guěpíhiḍ tangúⁿa; he-ikó yía óm-
tehed. Ac'hákie túi áte, heikó yía min túⁿoned. Tá
túngne: »pābie«, túngne, »heikó tsán, heikó yía
iⁿtoⁿmāⁿ.«

»Grandmother! bend [the stick] into a hoop!« Thereupon she bent [it] for [him] and cut [skin] out of her loins, then she fastened [with it both ends of the stick to make a hoop]. »Don't throw it up into the air!« »Yes!« the boy said; then he rolled it and threw it up into the air; thereupon [the hoop] fell down onto his head and split him in half. His Grandmother, who was sitting inside the tipi, thereupon heard two boys speaking. [One] said to the grandmother [tá, táⁿ]: »My brother,« he said, »has arrived! because he had split up into two.«